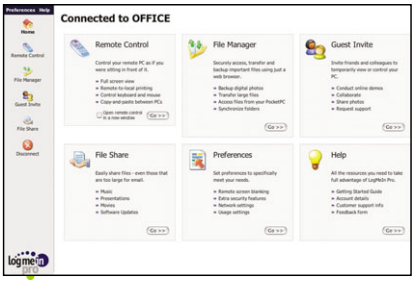
by Kevin Savetz

3am Labs LogMeIn Pro



LogMeIn Pro
$12.95 per month, $69.95 per year
3am Labs
www.logmein.com

Accessing your computer when you're away from it to view files or run programs is wonderful. LogMeIn Pro lets you do just this using an Internet-connected PC. For example, you can access your home PC from a laptop when you're out of town or grab a file from your office computer from home.

To access a system remotely, you must install LogMeIn Pro on that rig. Installation is easy using a Web browser with Java and ActiveX enabled, so there's no traditional install process. The system you want to access must be connected to the Web (a fast connection helps). The app uses 128- to 256-bit SSL encryption.

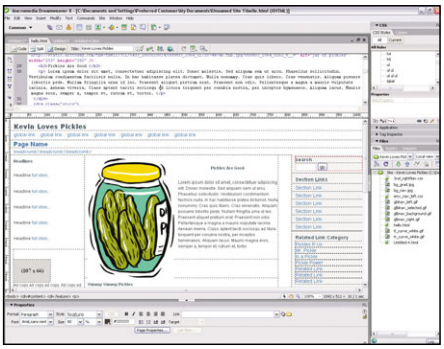
I tested LogMeIn Pro using two Windows XP machines located several miles apart, both with cable modem connections. Even with a software firewall on one machine and a hardware firewall on the other, LogMeIn Pro worked perfectly without having to reconfigure anything. The app also didn't flinch when my cable modem's IP address changed.

Accessing a remote system was very fast. In full-screen mode, I generally couldn't tell that the PC I was controlling was miles away. Screen colors were inexplicably tinged with pink, but the remote PC was very usable for running apps. When I accessed an app's print command remotely, the document printed locally.

LogMeIn also has tools for moving files between machines. For example, you can transfer a file from a remote PC to your local one or synchronize files between local and remote folders.

The app cost $12.95 per month or $69.95 per year to remotely access one PC. (There are discounts for accessing two or more PCs.) The PC that you want to remotely control must run Windows. 3am Labs says you can access that PC from a Pocket PC PDA, Mac, or Linux PC. I tried to control a Windows PC from a Mac and was stymied by Java errors. If you need remote access to/from computers running Mac OS X or Linux, consider VNC (free; www.realvnc.com); it has better cross-platform support, although it lacks some of LogMeIn Pro's features. ▲

Macromedia Dreamweaver 8



Dreamweaver 8
$399 ($199 upgrade)
Macromedia
www.macromedia.com

I started coding HTML by hand in 1994, when there were no decent HTML editors to speak of. Web development now is significantly more complex, but I still code many sites by hand. The site editors I've tried don't provide exacting control or don't integrate with PHP or produce HTML that is just ugly. Dreamweaver 8 addresses all these issues.

DW is a powerful tool for pro site designers, covering most facets of Web development. New users will need to climb a steep learning curve to see the benefits. An excellent Getting Started guide does provide plenty of information.

Before long I was creating good-looking, well-structured Web pages with the built-in templates. There are many in DW and more at Macromedia's site. DW supports most major scripting languages and Macromedia's graphics tools, including PHP, JavaScript, ColdFusion 7 MX, Fireworks, and Flash (not AJAX or Ruby on Rails.) Building dynamic pages, XML/RSS feeds, and MySQL-based sites with DW is no problem.

Version 8 keeps step with the latest Web technologies and shines particularly when it comes to CSS. The app's visualization tools let you see and understand complex CSS layouts, and new rulers let you take precise control over the positions of on-screen elements.

If you already use DW, you'll find improved integration of XML data feeds and flash video files. A new collapsible code feature lets you hide sections of code you aren't working with. Background file transfers are also new, letting you keep working while DW uploads files.

Dreamweaver is available for Windows and Mac OS X, with a similar feature set across platforms. At $399 the program is pricey, but the $199 upgrade is a bit easier to swallow. Dreamweaver is also available as part of the Studio 8 suite ($999 or $399 upgrade), which adds Flash Professional 8, Fireworks 8, and other tools. If you're a pro Web developer considering the upgrade, the program's additions make the decision easy. If you're considering jumping into Dreamweaver for the first time, you'll need to first spend time learning the ropes. ▲

CPU Ranking: 0 = Absolutely Worthless 2.5 = Absolutely Average 5 = Absolutely Perfect